

Summary of Opportunities and Challenges Facing Fruit and Vegetable Growers

(Summarized from Governor's Council for Agricultural Development Interviews May-July 2012)

CHALLENGES FOR FRUIT & VEGETABLE GROWERS	OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWERS	
Increasing Input Costs: labor, energy, fertilizer, packaging etc.	Meeting food safety expectations/certifications opens up new markets (GAP)	
Access to land for expansion	Branding (either sole brand or CT Grown, Harvest New England etc.)	
Availability of Skilled Labor; Schools turning out the appropriate skill set for ag management; Migrant/guest workers H2A: Federal regs difficult to navigate.	Access to credit	
Certifications required by wholesalers and buying institutions (GAP etc.) are expensive, complicated to put in place	Geography: high population area between NY and Boston	
Lack of infrastructure to support scale production: cold storage/refrigeration, processing facilities without building your own	Not many local/regional players (able to) marketing to larger-scale retailers	
Cracking the large retail buyer; Once in--cultivating the culture among produce mgrs. to engage in the values partial to local agriculture. Supermarkets are the most effective way to market local products to the largest number of consumers.	Demand for locally grown by retailers	
Pricing competitively to make the local option viable through the distribution channels' markup.	Organic agriculture can't keep up with demand	
Cooperative Extension-type resources keeping up with organic and other emerging techniques to guide growers (smaller) and to develop large-scale production technologies alongside major growers	Partnering on resources with other producers (i.e. equipment, shared distribution etc.)	
Distribution--getting fresh produce to markets AND providing service to retailers who buy in	Definition of local is diverse; i.e. 250 miles, a day's drive, within my state, etc.	
Establishing the expectation for Why is CT Grown better?--defining the value of the local brand (=freshness and quality?)	Belief that (certain) consumers are willing to pay more for local	
Consumers lack home kitchen and cooking skills to appreciate unprocessed local foods	Determine what we're competitive on in the market and take full advantage of that (select vegetables or fruits)	
Lack of a Connecticut-approved GAP/food safety program	Increasing focus on fruits and vegetables and direct relationship to a healthy lifestyle. (MyPlate replacing Food Pyramid; First Lady's White House gardening initiative etc.)	
Plenty of restaurant demand: no transportation to get it there to grow into viable business	Direct from the local farmer= guarantee of freshness and quality (is it true? do consumers believe this?)	
Too challenging for consumers to find local produce without extra investment in time/money	Creating value-added products for large buyers (with special on-farm processing required)	
Regulations are too often "one size fits all"; tough on raw and processed food	On-farm energy opportunities to help with energy costs (solar installations, OWFs etc.)	

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Limited state funding support in marketing the CT Grown brand	Produce Safety Alliance is trying to standardize national GAP guidelines	
GAP is necessary to sell through wholesalers and institutions, but not much perceived value to consumers yet. (Investment in procedure that has no marketing value to consumers.)	Widen the market and make local food more affordable to serve a greater market need	
Crop Insurance and Liability is challenging to comply (FSA NAP program); Growing the business seems blocked by increasing insurance issues	Indoor production rounds out CT's growing season; ultra-high value of crop	
Consumer understanding of seasonality	Imported fruits and vegetables will become over-priced., making CT grown more competitive.	
Managing pest and plant disease issues	On-farm energy production has great potential	
Consumers mis-informed about pesticide residue;	Agriculture can be entertainment: consumers are seeking experiences for themselves and their children (compete for entertainment dollars.)	
Consumers believe organic is the only safe food option.	How to use social media to connect with young, emerging consumers	
Natural forces/weather--beyond control, but can be breaking on the business	Growing demand for "ethnic crops"	
No Extension Food Scientist in CT providing guidelines/training on food safety and education to processors/producers	Custom grow for restaurants; direct market to them	
Inconsistent advice from state agencies: DPH, DoA,DCP and local agencies re: processing	More restaurant demand for locally grown than there is supply available	
Diversified farms with livestock and specialty crops have increased risk for food safety violations.	Focus on eating Fruits and Vegetables as a key piece of fighting obesity	
GAP certification is the price of entry to larger markets, but no oppty. to recover that cost marketing at wholesale prices	If Farmers' Mkts. evolve from many with smaller numbers of attendees to Indoor/Outdoor with vendor stalls--gives growers more control	
Emphasis on season extension, but how to accomplish that and maintain scale.	On-farm job programs during the season	
Higher production costs impacts competitiveness; affects business choices of farm managers	"Marketing" the value of the farm to its local community: access local food, plus jobs, lower taxes, greenscapes etc.	
Over-reliance on federal programs,	Your customers trust YOU.	
Business management like cash flow equally challenging as the farming		
Regulations tend to favor individuals or special interest organizations, not businesses		
Must grow what people are buying: meeting growing/changing market demand		
Financing sources are entrenched in "traditional agriculture", not willing to invest in new tech ventures		

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Maintaining the integrity of CT Grown--ensuring CT Grown means something and isn't hijacked by imposters		
Pest control of deer, turkeys, Canada geese -- contribute to crop contamination or water quality pollutants, but DEEP regulations that permit appropriate control not easy		
Quality of imported products has improved; tough to compete		
Assumed that local food costs more--has it been proven through research to be true		
Compliance, record-keeping, reporting, or training staff to do so		
Avoid letting "Agri-tainment" overpower the importance of food production		
Optimizing "bumper crops"--permitting gleaners without opening up liability to farm		
"Imported" pests (stinkbug, Emerald Ash Borer etc.) may threaten existing Integrated Pest Mgmt. tactics and require preventive spraying		
Thriving in a global marketplace		